

**Earth Keepers: A Community, Tribal and Faith-based Approach to Pollution  
Prevention in the Great Lakes Basin**

EPA Region 5 – Chicago, Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE) and  
Great Lakes National Program Office

**Geographic location or area of activity:** Greater Marquette area, 15 counties in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan--Lake Superior, Lake Michigan, and Lake Huron watersheds.

**Description of activity:** The Earth Keepers initiative is a unique coalition of faith communities in Michigan's Upper Peninsula that are taking action to protect public health and the environment. During 2004, the Superior Watershed Partnership helped form the Earth Keepers faith network that now includes 150 congregations/churches and over 50 communities representing approximately two-thirds of the Upper Peninsula's total population. Participating faiths include Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopal, Jewish, Presbyterian, Buddhist, Unitarian, Quaker, and Bahai. The Earth Keepers have proven to be one of the most diverse and effective stakeholder groups in the country. The success of the Earth Keepers partnership lies in unparalleled multi-denominational faith-based participation. Combined, these stakeholders represent 70% of the local community, allowing information disseminated through Earth Keepers to reach a much broader range of individuals than traditional public outreach programs. Other partners of the Earth Keepers including representatives from the environmental sector, industry, government, human health, business, recreation, and academia further expand the ability of the Earth Keepers to inform and involve the community.

Via EPA funding, state, local, and tribal partners, the Superior Watershed Partnership and its Earth Keepers partners have achieved unprecedented success with annual "Clean Sweep" multi-site one-day (Earth Day) collection events including 45.7 tons of household hazardous waste collected during 2005, over 300 tons of e-waste collected and recycled during 2006, and over a ton of pharmaceutical waste collected during 2007 including an estimated \$500,000 in narcotics.

Other community-based pollution prevention efforts include working with the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community to implement mercury thermometer exchange and fluorescent light bulb disposal programs for tribal members, working with the Superior District Dental Society to install mercury amalgam separators in over 30 dentist offices in Marquette and Alger counties to prevent mercury from entering local waterways, and a public education campaign on burn barrel use for trash disposal (problem source of dioxins) including assisting local units of government with development of zoning ordinances.

The Superior Watershed Partnership also provides energy conservation information to its Earth Keeper partners including hosting the first public energy workshop in the Upper Peninsula during 2007 and coordinating energy audits of Earth Keepers churches and houses of worship.

The Superior Watershed Partnership is also working with the USEPA (Region 5 and GLNPO) and Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Mayors Association to share successful Earth Keeper initiatives with communities around the Great Lakes.

**Interagency partners:** EPA Great Lakes National Program Office, EPA Region 5, Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, Michigan Senator Michael Prusi, Michigan Senator

Jason Allen, Congressman Bart Stupak, U.S. Senator Carl Levin, Michigan Department of Agriculture

**Local partners:**

- 150 congregations representing ten (10) faiths across the Upper Peninsula of Michigan
- 19 local and state police departments
- 25 regional pharmacies
- Cedar Tree Institute
- Northern Michigan University student Earth Keepers
- The Nature Conservancy of Michigan
- Thrivent Financial
- City of Marquette municipal wastewater treatment facility
- Michigan Interfaith Power & Light (MilPL)
- Marquette County Waste Management Authority
- Delta County Waste Management Authority

**Activity URLs:** <http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/active/2006/Apr06.html>  
<http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/active/2006/Nov06.html>  
<http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/active/2007/Apr-Jun07.html>



Volunteer pharmacists collect and catalog used drugs on Earth Day 2007, Marquette, MI